

Adolescents' Keeping Contact during COVID-19 Home Schooling

Introduction

Young generations, especially generation Z, live their lives on the internet, most of their social interactions take place in virtual space (Nestik, et.al., 2018a). However, continuous presence on the sites of social media is considered to be a form of behaviour expected by adolescent communities. Without this, youngsters could become isolated from their peer group. On the other hand, one of the hardest consequences of being constantly online is the situation that teenagers are not capable of managing separation anxiety (Tari, 2015). It is proved that overusing the internet and social media might result in internet addiction with several physical and mental symptoms. Among the problems caused by overusing the internet, the most typical ones are publishing most events of private life by posting and sharing pictures on social media, acknowledging social media acquaintances as friends, and internet addiction (Szabó, 2020a), while cyberbullying, involvement into illegal activities, and stimulation for antisocial and self-destructing behaviour are considered the most dangerous risks (Nestik, et.al., 2018b).

As generation Z communicates with each other and keeps contacts in social media, it seems obvious that home schooling and curfew, which was introduced in most European countries in spring, created no problem for adolescents: they continued or even increased the intensity of social media use – not only for learning but also for keeping in touch with their friends and – that time – with their family. Most researchers that focus on pupils, students, teachers, and professors have examined these people's attitude to online learning: how successfully students could acquire professional knowledge and skills, how perfectly teachers could use digital devices and could apply digital technology and methods in the new teaching-learning process. Only few researchers survey changes in both teachers and students' social life during curfew and their mental health problems due to isolation.

The research, which was conducted in May 2020 among secondary school students in Hungary, has a multifocal attitude discussing not only students' opinion on distance online education but also their experience on keeping in contact with their teachers, classmates, friends, and family members.

1. Generation Z's media consumption

Members of generation Z are the true digital natives, who were born in the digital age, did not have off-line childhood, and do not know the world without digital technology. At first sight, they seem

rather clever and smart in the digital age, being able to handle all digital devices. However, their social competences are not highly developed: they could hardly manage emotional conflicts and cannot feel the border between private and public information. Due to this shortage on social competence, adolescents could be led to situations that may cause stress and harm to them.

Most research results prove that generations, successive to each other, start using the internet at earlier and earlier age: members of gen Z start internet usage at the age of 10, even at 3 – however, not consciously at that age (<http://nmhh.hu>, Fegyverneki – Bene, 2018). Besides the initiation of internet use, its intensity is changing: members of gen Z spend about 6 hours on the internet every day, 3.5 hours actively (<http://nmhh.hu>). According to the results of Hungarian Youth Research in 2016, two third of youngsters aged 15-29 meet and communicate with their friends in the online space. Nearly 90 percent of adolescents use the internet and social media every day and approximately one fourth of them live their lives in an online mode. (Székely – Szabó, 2016)

Media consumption has an especially significant role in gen Z's life as more than half of adolescents consider the ban from using digital media as the most severe punishment (Kósa, 2018). Other surveys gained similar results: every second youngster aged 15-29 could bear no longer than a day without their smartphones (54%), without the internet (51%), and without their favourite site of social media (44%). (Székely – Szabó, 2016). Comparing internet use to consuming other media, all the other media are thrown into shade: half of generation Z, especially the younger members, watches films on the internet on their smartphones or tablets (Sipos, 2018), follow influencers, bloggers, and vloggers and these people are believed the referential ones for adolescents. What is more, information that is communicated by media celebrities is considered real and authentic, while the verity and authenticity of information gained from parents and teachers are questioned by youngsters (Danó, 2018).

On the other hand, members of generation Z reject most of the stereotypes. Although adolescents agree that they do multitasking and cannot live without their smartphones, they are convinced that they behave consciously in the online space (Szabó – Csikósné, 2021). Comparing the results of two researches, the biggest differences between teachers and students' opinions on the behaviour of generation Z can be seen in the following situations: always take selfies, post events of private life, consider social media acquaintances as friends, participate in cyberbullying either as a victim or as an abuser, spend time on the internet instead of learning, and not able to concentrate at school. While teachers stated that their students show the above mentioned behavioural patterns quite often, adolescents declared that an attitude like that is not typical to them (Szabó, 2020b; Panov – Patrakov, 2020). The statements examined by the researchers refer not only to teenagers behaviour but also to their contacts, especially in the online space, with their peers, friends, and acquaintances.

2. Contact in the period of home schooling

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the epidemic COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic. The consequence of the declaration and the health situation was that traditional education was changed by distance online education in most countries on most stages of education. According to UNESCO data, about 1.5 billion students had to study in the form of distance online education during COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding Hungary, from 16 March, education continued pure online on all education levels, from elementary classes to universities.

Except for the questions referring to the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process during home schooling, such as the availability of suitable devices, the proper access to the internet, and possessing high-level digital competence (Czifrusz – Misley – Horváth, 2020), other questions could be raised: has generation Z's internet consumption become more intensive during this period as they could communicate with both their friends and teachers only on the internet, or on the contrary, have their offline relationships with their family strengthened?

It is considered to be a fact that members of generation Z do their social interactions, especially with their peers, on the internet. Being always online and in contact with others is an expectation or even pressure from the peer group. The ones who are not available online could experience being isolated from their community with the feeling that who misses that is left behind. During the home schooling period, which started in Hungary in the middle of March and finished at the end of the academic year, in the middle of June, pupils and students at all stages of education could communicate with their peers only on the internet not only about their everyday activities and problems of their private life but also about their studies. What is more, children and adolescents could communicate even with their teachers only online. Although before the pandemic period, many teachers used various digital platforms, especially social media, to communicate with their students not in school environment, most interactions belonging to the everyday teaching-learning process, such as explaining learning materials, measuring students' knowledge, evaluating their performance, organising students' activities in the lessons, took place offline, in the classrooms. From one day to the other, all these activities and interactions were put to the online space, which might have been unusual not only for teachers but also for students.

Another question in connection with school-oriented online interactions, which principally used to take place in the offline space, refers to the development of social competence. According to the reference framework elaborated by the European Committee in 2006, social competence is one of the eight key competences and is stated to be essential in a knowledge-based society (<https://ofi.oh.gov.hu/tudastar/nemzetkozi-kitekintes/egesz-eleten-at-tarto>). Social competence cannot be taught so directly such as the foreign language or mathematical competence. Social compe-

tence contains forms of behaviour that individuals must acquire participating in society, in both private and public interactions successfully, effectively, and in a constructive way. As such, social competence is learnt through active and passive (as an observer) participation in human interactions, e.g. in communication with others.

Pure online multiplayer communication cannot play its role to develop students' social competence when students could see just a small picture of the teachers and teachers often could not see and even could not hear their students as students often participated in lessons with the camera off and muted microphone. As many parents worked in home office during the pandemic, the close family had a significant role to provide mental and social support for children and to pay attention to developing their social competence.

3. Research design and results

The research was conducted with a self-administered questionnaire in May 2020 among secondary school students. The survey was sent, through online channels, to school directors and teachers, who forwarded it to their students. More than 800 responses arrived, out of which there were 560 full responses. The aim of the research was to get a picture of how adolescents participated in distance online learning introduced due to curfew, what were their experiences during home schooling and isolation: how they could acquire learning materials; keep in contacts with their teachers, classmates, and friends; manage all their relationships only in the online space. The current study presents only results referring to social interactions during home schooling.

The gender distribution of the sample was nearly equal: 42% of boys and 58% of girls. Regarding respondents' age: the youngest was 13, while the oldest 25 years old, the average age was 16.81 years. Students study in four different secondary school types, which refer to the quality of the school. Nearly one fourth of the (23%) go to grammar school, usually the highest quality of secondary education in Hungary. One fifth of them (21%) study in vocational education, which is considered the lowest quality. More than half of the students (54%) go to technical secondary school, which provides both secondary vocational qualification and opportunity to enter higher education. Only 2% go to special vocational school, where typically students with special needs go to.

The results of the research confirm that generation Z spends a lot of time in the online space. According to the answers, the time spent on the internet significantly increased during home schooling. While before pandemic, adolescents spent in the online space approximately 3 hours 17 minutes learning and 3 hours 25 minutes entertaining, during distance online education students spent 4 hours 15 minutes learning and 4 hours 56 minutes entertaining on the internet. Paired Sample Test showed that there are significant differences between the periods of time spent on the internet before and after

COVID-19 in the case of both activities ($p=0,000$; learning: $t=-6,310$, $df=401$; entertainment: $t=15,541$, $df=505$). It could be highlighted that time spent on entertainment increased to a bigger extent than that on learning.

The most important part of the survey was the block of 50 questions referring to adolescents' habits and attitudes during pandemic home schooling. Respondents evaluated the statements on a 5-grade Likert-scale indicating to what extent the statements are typical to them (1=absolutely not, 5=fully). In the current paper, the focus is on adolescents' relationships and social contacts.

According to Table 1, being at home all the time (2.13), or studying from home with their family around (2.50) caused little problem for adolescents. Moreover, there were only few family conflicts due to everybody studying and working from home (2.17). Nevertheless, adolescents did not talk to their family more frequently (3.21) or organise more family programs (2.99) than before the pandemic. Although adolescents felt only partly isolated (2.82) as they somehow could communicate with their teachers (3.46), however, not perfectly, mostly properly could communicate with their peers (3.91), and they significantly experienced their parents' support (3.83), what they missed most was personal meetings with their peers (4.10).

They bother being all the time with their families.	2.13
There are conflicts in the family as everybody must study or work from home.	2.17
They meet their friends personally several times a week.	2.35
They bother about their family being always at home and never being on their own.	2.50
They are more frequently angry and furious during the curfew period.	2.54
They bother having to communicate in writing more often.	2.61
They have difficulties with online learning as they do not have direct contact with their teachers and classmates.	2.70
They are often bored at home.	2.74
They bother not seeing their teachers' feedback on their schoolwork.	2.76
They do not feel isolated as they meet their friends online every day.	2.82
They organise programs with their families at the weekends.	2.99
They more often talk to their parents during the curfew period.	3.21
They miss meeting further family members personally.	3.24
They can easily keep in contact with their teachers during the curfew period.	3.46
They bother not being able to go out.	3.48

Their parents support them to survive isolation.	3.83
They can perfectly keep in contact with their friends online.	3.91
They miss meeting their friends and classmates personally.	4.10

Table 1: Students opinion on the attitude to their contacts

Based on the results, adolescents were satisfied with keeping in touch online both with their teachers and classmates, as they did not really bother not being able to communicate with their teachers and classmates directly (2.70) or not seeing the teachers' feedback at once (2.76). Although they could communicate with their peers properly, they still missed personal meetings with their friends. The data show unexpected results: despite the fact that students, before the pandemic, were used to personal contacts regarding their school activities and communication with their teachers, they could easily adjust to online situations. On the other hand, the net generation generally keeps in touch online with their friends regardless of the pandemic, the biggest problem for adolescents was not seeing their friends personally.

Time spent in the online space both on learning and on entertainment during home schooling has a significant correlation with several variables. The more time they spent learning online, the more they missed personal meetings with their peers (0.195**), the more they bothered not seeing the teachers' feedback (0.230**), and the more they experienced the parents' support (0.152**). On the other hand, the more time spent entertaining online, the less they missed personal meetings (-0.129**), the less they bothered not seeing their teachers' feedback (-0.147**), the less frequently they organised programs with their family (-0.180**), the less they missed the meetings with further family members (-0.193**) but the more they bothered their family being at home all the time (0.127**). Although the correlation is weak, the tendency is obvious: a positive attitude towards learning has a positive impact on beneficial relationships even during home schooling.

The aim of the research was to find some tendencies among the members of gen Z regarding their attitude towards contacts and relationships during the curfew period in spring 2020. Factor analysis was done, which resulted in four factors: Lack of separation, Feeling locked, Family support, and Functioning online relationships. Into the factor 'Lack of separation', four statements belong, such as they bother being all the time with their families (0.839), they bother about their family being always at home and never being on their own (0.788) or there are conflicts in the family (0.737). Factor 'Feeling locked' incorporates only three variables, such as they bother not being able to go out (0.817) and they miss meeting their friends and classmates personally (0.748). Factor 'Family support' includes variables like they more often talk to their parents during the curfew period (0.743) and they organise programs with their families at the weekends (0.702). Finally, factor 'Functioning online relationships' contains five variables, such as they can perfectly keep contact with their friends online

(0.720), they can easily keep contact with their teachers (0.644), and they do not feel isolated as they meet their friends online every day (0.603).

The new factors were saved as new variables indicating four different attitudes of generation Z, two positive and two negative ones. Further analysis was conducted with the four new variables. It was examined whether there is a gender difference in relation to adolescents' attitudes. In all cases, the difference is significant between boys and girls ($p < 0.05$).

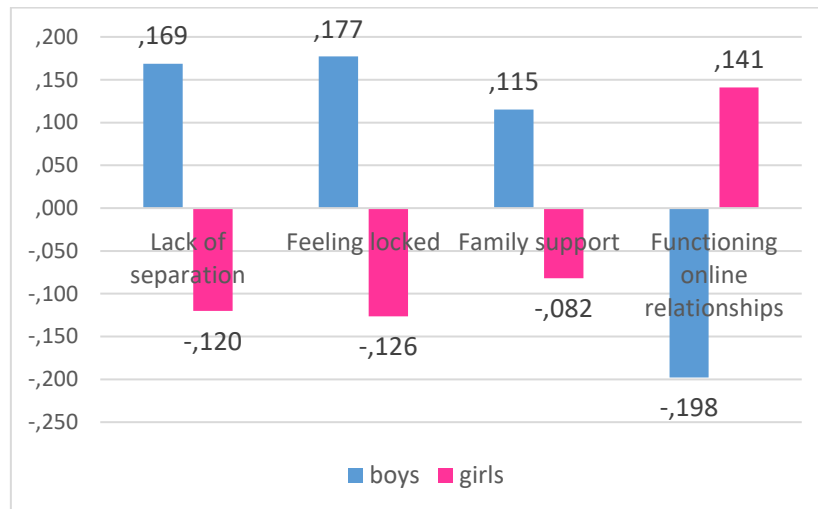


Fig 1: Difference between the attitude of boys and girls

According to the diagram (Fig. 1), girls did much better in coping with mental problems caused by curfew. Although it was less typical for girls to receive support from their parents, they are less characterized by feeling separated or locked at home, but it is more typical to them having well-functioning relationships in the online space.

Family background, especially mother's qualification has an impact on adolescents' attitude to keeping a healthy relationship online. According to ANOVA analysis, there are significant differences between students regarding the factors of family support ($p < 0.05$) and functioning online relationship ($p < 0.01$). Experiencing family support follows a usual trend in Hungary: it is less typical to adolescents with low qualification mothers and more typical to the ones with higher qualification mothers. The only exception is children with master-degree mothers.

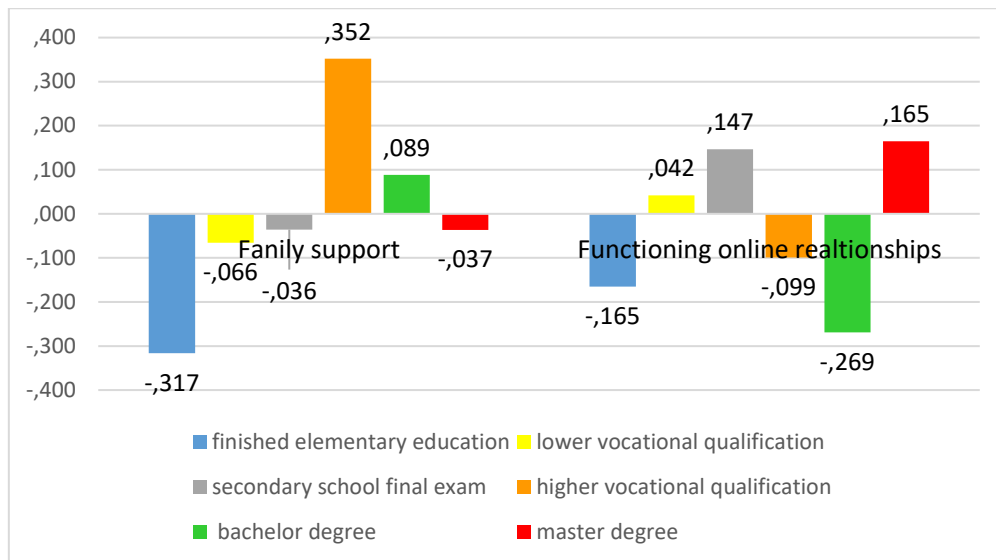


Fig. 2: Difference between students according to their mothers' qualification

Regarding the variable 'Functioning online relationships', the picture is more varied: it is less typical to adolescents with elementary and bachelor qualification mothers and more typical to the ones with a secondary exam and a master degree, which means, no clear tendency can be detected. According to the results, a mother's qualification has little impact on adolescents' attitude to keeping in touch only online and their coping techniques with this situation.

Conclusions

Generation Z are used to having smart devices, communicating on online platforms, and keeping in contact with their peers on the internet, especially in social media. However, before pandemic home schooling, adolescents mostly used digital technology, programs, and applications for entertainment and keeping in touch with their friends but not very frequently for learning purposes. In spring, during online distance education, students have to get accustomed to managing learning software and applications, studying through online platforms, and contacting not only with their friends, as earlier, but also with their teachers via the internet.

According to the research results, members of generation Z could successfully cope with the situation of home schooling. Regarding their relationships, they could adjust to communicating with their teachers, friends, and further family members online. Although they could very well communicate with their peers online and did not feel isolated, they mostly missed personal meetings with their friends.

As most of their activities were closed to digital devices and the internet, the time spent in the cyber space has significantly increased. On the other hand, if the time was spent mostly on entertainment, it has a negative impact on their relationships not only with their teachers but also with their closer

and further family members: they were not really involved in offline family programs, rather they bothered their family being around them. The results show that girls could much better cope with the negative impacts of home schooling and could more successfully adapt to the situation. As they had more functioning online relationships, not only with their friends, they experienced a lower level of isolation.

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